



» Moonlight Books

ARTHUR RIMBAUD  
**LETTRE DU VOYANT**  
& OTHER WRITINGS

*Long ago, if I remember well, my life was a feast  
where all hearts were open, where all wines flowed.*







## PROLOGUE –

*I did not know him, but I saw him once, at one of those literary banquets, arranged in haste, towards the end of the War – the Dinner of Naughty Good-fellows – named by an antithesis, and made famous by the painting and by Verlaine's description of Rimbaud in Les Poètes Maudits. "He was tall, well built, almost athletic, with the perfectly oval face of an exiled angel, with disorderly hair and pale blue eyes which were disturbing." There was a mysterious something about him either proudly or meanly flaunted, that recalled a daughter of the people, with a laundrywoman appearance, because of his enormous hands, reddened with chilblains that result from rapid changes in temperature, which may have indicated even more terrible jobs, since they belonged to a boy. I later learned that they had signed some beautiful poems, unpublished...*

– Stéphane Mallarmé

April, 1896



To Paul Demeny

At Douai.

*Charleville, 15th May, 1871.*

I've decided to give you an hour's worth of modern literature. I begin at once with a contemporary psalm:

PARISIAN WAR SONG

Spring is at hand, for lo,  
Within the city's garden plots  
The government's harvest is starting to grow –  
But the gardeners call the shots!

O May! What bare-assed ecstasy!  
Sèvres, Meudon, Bagneux, Asnières,  
Hear our Farmer-Generals, busy  
Planting in the empty air!

Guns and sabers glitter in parade,  
Bright-mouthed weapons pointing straight ahead –  
It's a treat for them to stomp their feet  
In the mud of a river running red!

Never, never now will we retreat  
From our barricades, our piles of stone;  
Beneath their clubs our blond skulls crack  
In a dawn that was meant for us alone.

Like Eros, politicians hover overhead,  
Their shadows withering the flowers;  
Their bombs and flames paint our garden red:  
Their bug-faced forces trample ours...

They are all great friends of the Grand Truc!  
Their chief in his gladiolus bed holds back  
His tears, puts on a sorrowful look,  
Sniffs smoke-filled air, and winks.

The city's paving stones are hot  
In spite of the gasoline you shower,  
And absolutely, now, right now, we've got  
To find a way to break your power!

Bourgeois, bug-eyed on their balconies.  
Shaking at the sound of breaking glass,  
Can hear trees falling on the boulevards  
And, far off, a shivering scarlet clash.



Here is some prose about the future of poetry:

All ancient poetry culminated with the Greeks. Harmonious life. From Greece down to the romantic movement – the Middle Ages – there are men of letters and versifiers. From Ennius to Theroldus, from Theroldus to Casimir Delavigne, all is rhymed prose, a game, the stupidity and glory of endless idiotic generations. Racine alone is pure, strong, and great. But if his rhymes had been twisted, his hemstitches mixed up, the Divine Fool would have been as unknown today as the latest-come author of *Origins*. – After Racine the game gets moldy. It has lasted for two thousand years!

No joke, and no paradox. My reason inspires me more certainly on this subject than a young radical has fits of rage. And besides, newcomers can swear at their ancestors: it is their house and they've got all the time in the world.

Romanticism has never been fairly judged. Who is to judge it? The critics!! The romantics? – They prove very well that the song is rarely the work, or understood thought, of the singer.

For *I* is an *other*. If brass wakes up a bugle, it is not its fault. That is obvious to me. I witness the unfolding of my thought: I watch it, I listen to it. I draw a bow across a string: a symphony stirs in the depths, or leaps upon the stage.

If the old fools had not found only the false meaning of Ego we would not now be having to sweep away these millions of skeletons which, for ages, have been piling up the fruits of their one-eyed intellects, proclaiming themselves to be the authors!

In Greece, as I said, words and music gave a rhythm to Action. Afterward, music and rhymes became a game, a pastime. The study of this past charms the curious: many people delight in reworking these antiquities: – that is their business. Universal intelligence has always cast off its ideas naturally; men picked up these fruits of the mind: they acted upon them, they wrote books about them: so was the way things went on, man did not develop

himself, not yet awake, or not yet aware of the great dream. Pen-pushers, these writers: the author, the creator, the poet, that man has never existed!

The first task of a man who wants to be a poet is to study his own self-awareness, in its entirety; he seeks out his soul, he inspects it, he tests it, he learns it. As soon as he knows it, he must cultivate it. That seems simple: in every mind a natural development takes place; so many so-called *egoists* proclaim themselves authors; there are many others who even attribute their intellectual progress to themselves! – But the problem is to make the soul monstrous: after the fashion of the *comprachicos\**, if you like! Imagine a man planting and cultivating warts on his face.

I say that one must be a *Seer*, make oneself a *Visionary*.

The Poet makes himself a seer by a long, prodigious, and rational *disorganization* of *all the senses*. All the forms of love, of suffering, of madness; he searches himself, he exhausts all the poisons in him, keeping only their quintessences. Unspeakable torment where he needs the greatest faith, a superhuman strength, where he becomes, above all others, the great invalid, the great criminal, the great accursed, – and the Supreme Scientist! – For he arrives at the *unknown*! Because he has cultivated his soul, already rich, more than anyone else! He attains the unknown, and if, demented, he ends up by losing the meaning of his visions, he will at least have seen them! So what if he is destroyed in his flight through the unheard-of and unnameable things: other horrible workers will come; they will begin at the horizons where the other has fallen!

– To be continued in six minutes –

I interrupt my discourse with another psalm: be so kind as to lend a friendly ear to it, – and everybody will be delighted. – Bow in hand, I begin:

#### MY LITTLE LOVELIES

A tearful tincture washes  
Cabbage-green skies;  
Beneath your dribbling bushes  
Your raincoats lie;

Pale white in secret moonlight,  
Like round-eyed sores,  
Flap your scabby thighs apart,  
My ugly whores!

We loved each other in those days,  
Ugly blue whore!  
We ate boiled eggs  
And weed.

One night you made me a poet,  
Ugly blonde whore.  
Get between my legs,  
I'll whip you.

There. And please note that, if I were not afraid of making you spend more than sixty centimes on postage, – I, a poor pauper who, for seven months, haven't had a single bronze cent! – I would also send you my 'Amant de Paris,' a hundred hexameters, Sir, and my 'Mort de Paris,' two hundred hexameters!

Here we go again:

The poet, therefore, is truly the thief of fire.

He is responsible for humanity, for *animals* even; he will have to make sure his visions can be smelled, fondled, listened to; if what he brings back from *beyond* has form, he gives it form; if it has none, he gives it none. A language must be found; besides, all speech being idea, the time for a universal language will come! One has to be an Academician, - deader than a fossil - to compile a

dictionary in any language. Weak-minded people who begin to *think* about the first letter of the alphabet would quickly go mad!

This language will be of the soul and for the soul, it will include everything: perfumes, sounds, colors, thought grappling with thought. The poet would define the quantity of unknown arising in his time awakening in the universal soul; he would give more than the formulation of his thought, than the record of *his path toward Progress!* Enormity becoming the norm, absorbed by everything, he would really be *a multiplier of progress!*

This future will be materialist, as you see; – Always full of *Number* and *Harmony*, these poems will be made to last. – Essentially, it would be again Greek poetry, in a way.

This eternal art will be functional, since the poets are citizens. Poetry will no longer give rhythm to action; it *will be in advance of it*.

And these poets will be! When the eternal servitude of woman is broken, when she lives for herself and through herself, when man, – hitherto abominable, – having given her her freedom, she too will be a poet! Woman herself will discover the unknown! Will her worlds of ideas differ from ours? – She will find strange, unfathomable, repulsive, delicious things; we will accept them, we will understand them.

Meanwhile, let us ask the *poet* for the *something new*, – ideas and forms. All the clever ones would soon believe that they have answered this demand: – But that's not it!

The first Romantics were *seers* without quite realizing it: the cultivation of their souls began accidentally: abandoned locomotives, still running down the rails. – Lamartine is sometimes a seer, but strangled by the old forms. Hugo, *too pig-headed*, has really had some vision in his latest works: *Les Misérables* is a real poem. I have *Les Châtiments* at hand; *Stella* gives some

measure of Hugo's vision. Too much Belmontet and Lamennais, Jehovahs and columns, old worn-out enormities.

Musset is fourteen times abominable for this suffering generation carried away by visions – to whom his angelic laziness has insulted! O! those insipid tales and proverbs! O his *Nuits*! His *Rolla*, His *Namouna*, His *Chalice*! It's all so French, that is to say: hateful to the highest degree; French, but not Parisian! Another work of the evil genius that inspired Rabelais, Voltaire, Jean La Fontaine! and the commentaries given by M. Taine!

Vernal is Musset's wit! Charming, his love! There it is, painted on enamel, real solid poetry! *French* poetry will be enjoyed for a long time, but only in France. Every grocer's boy can reel off a Rolla, every seminarian has his five hundred rhymes hidden away in a secret notebook. At age fifteen, these outbursts of passion send boys to rutting, at sixteen they can recite them with *heart*; at eighteen, at seventeen even, every schoolboy who can write a Rolla, writes a Rolla! Perhaps some still die of it. Musset could not do anything worthwhile; there were visions behind the lace curtains: but he closed his eyes. French, sloppy, dragged from bar-room to schoolroom, the beautiful corpse is dead, and for now on, let us not even bother to awaken it with our cries!

The second Romantics are very *Visionary*: Théophile Gautier, Leconte de Lisle, Theodore de Banville. But to examine the invisible and hear the unheard-of is quite different from reviving the spirit of dead things, so Baudelaire is the first Seer, king of poets, *a real God*. But he lived in a too artistic a milieu; and his form which is so praised is stingy. The inventions of the unknown demand new forms.

Stuck in the old forms, among the idiots, A. Renaud - has done his Rolla – L. Grandet – has done his Rolla; the Gauls and the Mussets, Popelin, Soulayr, Salles; the schoolboys, Marc, Aicard, Theuriet; the dead and the imbeciles: Autran, Barbier, L. Pichat, Lemoyne, the Deschamps, the Desessarts; the journalists, L. Cladel

Robert Luzarches, X. de Ricard; the fantasists, C. Mendès; the bohemians; the women; the talents, Léon Dierx, Sully-Prudhomme, Coppée. The new school, called Parnassian, has two visionaries: Albert Mérat and Paul Verlaine, a real poet.

So there you are. – I am working to make myself a *Seer*. Let us close with a pious hymn:

### SQUATTINGS

Later, when he feels his stomach upset,  
Brother Milotus, with a glance at the skylight  
Where the sun, bright as a new-polished pot,  
Gives him a headache and dazzles his eyesight,  
Beneath his bedclothes moves his priestly gut.

He flaps about beneath his graying sheets  
And then gets up and gropes to find his basin,  
Scared as an old man who's swallowed his teeth,  
Because he has his thick nightshirt to fasten  
Around his gut before he can proceed!

He shivers and squats, with his toes tucked up  
Beneath him, shaking in sunshine that smears cracker-  
Yellow on windowpanes papered at the top;  
The old man's nose – it glows like scarlet lacquer –  
Sniffs the sunshine, like some fleshy polyp.

The old man stews by the fire, dribbling lip  
Over his stomach; his thighs slip, then settle;  
He feels his scorched britches, his dying pipe;  
Something that was once a bird burbles a little  
In a stomach soft as a heap of tripe.

A tangle of banged up furniture, deep  
In greasy rags, bulging like filthy bellies;  
Fantastic stools like clumsy toads are heaped  
In corners: sideboards have singer's gullets  
Gaping with horrid appetite for sleep.

A sickening heat stifles the narrow room;  
The old man's brain is stuffed with scraps from junk heaps.  
He hears hairs growing deep in his damp skin,  
And sometimes burps, and rather gravely hiccups,  
And jolts the shaky stool he squats upon...

And at night the brightness of the moonlight,  
Dribbling on the curves of his ass, discloses  
A dark shadow that falls across a bright  
Pink snowdrift, pink as blushing summer roses...  
An odd nose traces Venus through the night.

You would be a bastard not to answer; quickly for in a week  
I'll be in Paris – perhaps.

Goodbye. A. Rimbaud.

## THE DRUNKEN BOAT –

As I drifted down impassive waters  
I felt myself no longer guided by the hauler's ropes:  
Howling redskins had taken them as targets  
and nailed them naked to colored posts.

I cared nothing for the crews,  
their cargos of English cotton or Flemish wheat.  
When the haulers could no longer guide me,  
the waters took me wherever I pleased.

Through the wilds of the tides  
last winter, dumber than a child,  
I ran! – And the unmoored Peninsulas had never  
seen such a triumphant commotion!

A storm blessed my sea-borne awakening.  
Lighter than a cork I danced upon its currents,  
those that men call *rollers of the dead*. For ten nights  
I never missed losing sight of the harbor-lights.

Sweeter than sour apples to children  
green water penetrated my pinewood hull,  
washed clean the wine-stains and the vomit,  
and carried away both my rudder and my anchor.

And so, I bathed in the Poem of the Sea,  
infused with stars churning into milk,  
devouring the green azures; a wonderful flotsam,  
with studious drowning men drifting by.

When suddenly, coloring all the blue,  
the slow delirious rhythms of the day, there came  
stronger than alcohol, greater even than music:  
The boiling bitter redness of Love.



I saw the sky bursting open with lightning,  
known its waterspouts, its undertow and currents.  
And I know the evening and the dawn rising like doves.  
And I have seen what men only thought they saw.

I've seen the low sun stained with mystical horrors  
shining on long violet coagulations.  
With a shutter the rolling waves fall  
like actors in ancient forgotten dramas.

I dreamt of green night and dazzling snows,  
slow kisses rising in the eyes of the Sea,  
the circulation of undreamed-of saps yellow and blue  
awakening upon a phosphorescent melody!

For months I witnessed the surge of the sea  
attacking the reef like a herd of beasts.  
Never thinking the luminous feet of Mary  
could put a muzzle on the brutish force of the waves.

I've encountered, you realize, incredible Floridas,  
flowers commingling the eyes of panthers  
with the skin of men! Rainbows bridling  
blind flocks beneath the horizon!

I've seen seething swamps, and snares,  
where a Leviathan rots in the reeds.  
Waters falling in the midst of serenity  
and distances that cataract down in the deep.

Glaciers, silver suns, pearly waves, fiery skies!  
Hideous wrecks in the depths of brown gulfs  
where giant snakes devoured by vermin  
fall from gnarled trees black and stank!

I would love to show the children those fishes  
shining in the blue waves, golden singing fish –  
Flowery foams cradled my drifting,  
at times ineffable winds lent me their wings.

At times the sea, that weary martyr of poles  
and zones, whose sobs sweetened my rolling,  
would raised up to me its shady blooms, its yellow bells –  
Then, I remained like a woman on bended knees.

All but an island, I tossed on my beaches the quarrels  
and droppings of clamoring blond-eyed birds.  
I sailed, while through my frail rigging  
the drowned rose & fell back again, descending into sleep!

But now I, a boat lost beneath locks of hair,  
am hurled by the storm into the birdless ether;  
all the Monitors and Merchant ships  
couldn't fish up my body drunk with the sea.

Free, smoking, risen from violet fogs,  
I tore through the wall of reddening sky  
wet with the jam of a poet's inspiration,  
sunny lichens and azured snots;

I ran stained with electric animals,  
my planking warped, escorted by black sea-horses,  
when hot July was collapsing under hammers  
beating fiery funnels from the ultramarine;

I trembled to feel fifty leagues away  
the moans of rutting behemoths, Maelstroms  
eternally spinning a stagnant blue.  
I long for Europe and its ancient walls!

I have seen archipelagos of stars! And islands  
whose delirious skies lie open to the sailor!  
Is it in these fathomless nights that you sleep  
O million golden birds? O future strength?

I've wept too much! The dawns are so heartbreaking.  
Every moon is cruel, every sun bitter:  
Sour love has swelled me with drunken languor.  
Let my keel break! Let me sink back into the sea!

If I long for a shore in Europe  
it is a cool, dark pond at balmy twilight  
where a child kneels full of sadness  
launching a fragile boat frail as a May butterfly.

No longer, O waves, can I bathe in your languor,  
clear the wake of cotton freighters,  
nor assault the pride of flags and pennants,  
nor swim under the horrible barges eyes.



## VAGABONDS –

Pitiful brother! What atrocious vigils I owe to him!

"I did not seize ardently on this enterprise.  
I had trifled with his infirmity.  
Through my own fault we would have returned to exile  
and to slavery".

He credited me unlucky and very strangely innocent,  
but for disturbing reasons.

I responded to this Satanic doctor with sneers,  
and ended up earning the window.  
Beyond the countryside traversed by bands of rare music,  
I created the ghosts of future nocturnal luxury.

After this vaguely hygienic distraction,  
I spread myself on a straw mattress.

And, almost every night, as soon as I was asleep,  
the poor brother would rise, with rotten mouth,  
and eyes pulled out, – such as he dreamed himself! –  
and drag me across the room  
while howling his dream of idiot sorrow.

I had in fact, in all sincerity of spirit, pledged myself  
to restore him to his primitive state as child of the sun, –  
and so we wandered, nourished on the wine of the caves  
and the biscuit of the road,  
myself impatient to find the place and the formula.



Soyelles.

A noir, E blanc, Rouge, U vert, O bleu : Soyelles,  
Je dirai quelque jour vos naissances latentes :  
A, noir corset velu des mouches éclatantes  
Qui combinent autour des poanteurs cruelles,  
Golfe d'ombre, E, ~~filon~~<sup>plandant</sup> des vapeurs et des tentes,  
Hanches des glaciers fiers, rois blancs, frisons d'ombelles;  
I, pourpres, sang craché, rire des lèvres belles  
Dans la colère ou les ivresses préintentes ;  
U, cycles, vibrations divins des mers vides,  
Paix des pâtes semées d'animaux, païs des rides  
Que l'alchimie imprime aux grands fronts studieux ;  
O Suprême Clairon plein des stupeurs étranges,  
Silences traversés des mondes et des Anges :  
— O l'Omega, rayon violet de Ses Yeux ! —

A. Rimbaud

































At any cost, in every breath, even in metaphysical journeys. – But that is over.



## PROMONTORY –

The golden dawn and shivering evening find our brig  
In waters opposite this Villa and its dependencies  
Which form a promontory as extensive as Epirus or the  
Peloponnesus,  
Or the great island of Japan, or Arabia!  
    Temples enlightened by the return of *théories*,  
Prodigious views of modern coastal defenses;  
Dunes illustrated with flaming flowers and bacchanals;  
The grand channels of Carthage  
And the Embankments of sleazy Venice,  
Laconic eruptions of Etnas and the crevasses of flowers and glacial  
waters,  
Washhouses encircled with German poplars;  
The slopes of strange parks rising above Japanese trees,  
    The circular facades of the "Royals" and the "Grands"  
Of Scarborough or Brooklyn, and their railways  
Flank, cut-through, and overhang the appointments of this Hotel,  
Chosen from the most elegant and most colossal constructions  
Of Italy, America and Asia,  
Whose windows and terraces are now full of lights,  
Drinks and rich breezes,  
And open to the fancy of the travelers and noblemen –  
Who allow, at daily hours, all the serenades of the illustrious  
coasts, –  
And the same old stories from the famous valleys of art,  
To decorate marvelously the facades of Promontory Palace.



Barbare

Bien après les jours et les saisons, et les êtres  
et les pays,

Le pavillon en viande saignante sur la soie des  
mers et de fleurs arctiques; (elles n'existent pas.)

Remis des vieilles fanfares d'hérissement — qui nous  
attaquent encore le cœur et la tête — loin des  
anciens assassins —

Oh! Le pavillon en viande saignante sur la soie  
des mers et de fleurs arctiques; (elles n'existent pas)

Douceurs!

Le ~~fo~~<sup>brassiers</sup> ~~fo~~ pleurant aux rafales de givre,  
— Douceurs! — Le feu à la pluie du vent de diamants  
jetés par le cœur terrestre éternellement carbonisé  
pour nous. — O monde! —

(Loin des vieilles retraites et des vieilles flammes,  
qu'on entend, qu'on sent)

Le ~~fo~~<sup>brassiers</sup> et les écumes. La musique, virement  
des gauffres et choc de glaçons aux astres.

O Douceurs, o monde, o musique! Et là, les  
formes, les sueurs, les chevelures et les yeux flottant.  
Et les larmes blanches, bouillantes, — Douceurs! —  
et la voix féminine arruée au fond des volcans  
et de grottes arctiques.

Le pavillon ...













# ARTHUR RIMBAUD

*"The Poet makes himself a seer by a long, prodigious, and rational disorganization of all the senses. All the forms of love, of suffering, of madness; he searches himself, he exhausts all the poisons in him, keeping only their quintessences."*

With these words Arthur Rimbaud set down his manifesto on the future of poetry and virtually invented the artistic sentiment of the coming century - all at the tender age of sixteen. An iconoclast of the very first order, Rimbaud has been the acknowledged inspirations of countless artists from the Surrealists to the Beats, Picasso and Dali, Bob Dylan, Jim Morrison, Patti Smith and Pete Dougherty. He scandalized literary Paris, astonished Victor Hugo, who called him an 'Infant Shakespeare', and reinvented poetry and the artistic lifestyle for all who would follow, before abandoning it all to live the life of an adventurer and trader in the most inhospitable regions of Eastern Africa. Rimbaud forever commands a position in the literary avant garde, an eternal figure of youthful rebellion and unbridled genius.

## LETTRE DU VOYANT & OTHER WRITINGS

